

PRESBYTERIANISM:

What it has done and What it may do

IN THE

CANADIAN NORTH-WEST.

*Being a Sermon preached in Knox Church, Winnipeg,
July 16th. 1884, at the opening of*

THE FIRST SYNOD

OF

Manitoba*and*the*North-west*Territories,

BY THE MODERATOR,

REV. PROFESSOR GEORGE BRYCE, LL.D.

BY REQUEST OF SYNOD.

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PRESBYTERIANISM.

WHAT IT HAS DONE AND WHAT IT MAY DO IN THE NORTHWEST.

The following interesting review of the work of the Church, by Rev. Prof. Bryce, LL.D., First Moderator of Synod, was delivered before the Synod of Manitoba on Wednesday evening, 16th July, 1884, on the texts:—

Heb. XIII: 7.—“Remember them which had the rule over you [revised version], who spoke to you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation: Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day and forever. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.”

2 Tim. IV: 2.—“Preach the word: be instant [press on—Alford] in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine.”

Presbyterians are very sensitive as to anything approaching man-worship. Their fundamental conception of God is so grand that man is hidden in the blaze of God's glory. And yet the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews feels at liberty to employ the great cloud of Christian witnesses named in Hebrews xi, and their heroic deeds, as incentives to us toward noble action. In the first passage before us, also, he uses the memory of the departed fathers of the church to incite the Hebrew Christians to faithful effort. This evening, appointed as I have been by the General Assembly, and chosen by the Synod itself, to open this Synod,—the first in the Northwest,—I feel as if I occupied the place rightly belonging to one called away from us, and now, we trust, a member of the General Assembly and church of the First-Born in heaven—I mean the late Rev. Dr. Black. It seems appropriate that in opening this new synod, I should refer to the faith and sacrifices of those who were our church's first missionaries, rulers and patterns of excellence in the Northwest.

Though our ecclesiastical history has not been continuous it begins with the earliest attempt at settlement in the Northwest—the Selkirk Colony. The first colonial missionary of any of the churches to Rupert's Land was James

Sutherland, an elder authorized by the Church of Scotland to baptize and marry, who came to the Red River in 1815. A colony of Highlanders without a religious teacher would be an anomaly. The fervor of the Highland nature will enable it to endure scanty food, the privations of war, persecution or poverty uncomplainingly, but not the want of religious worship. The colonists' agreement with Lord Selkirk included four things. 1. To have the services of a minister of their own church; 2. One hundred acres of land on certain conditions; 3. A market for their produce in the colony; 4. All the privileges of British subjects.

Their first condition was a religious one. Years came and went but their minister did not come. Mr. Sutherland for three years performed the duties of his office, until, in the conflict between the rival fur companies, he was forcibly taken away by the Nor'-West Company in 1818. He left a fragrant memory behind him, for as one said, “Of all men, clergymen or others, that ever entered this country, none stood higher in the estimation of the settlers, both for sterling piety and Christian conduct than Mr. Sutherland.” Mr. Sutherland was not a college-bred man, but if the two be separated, a basis of piety is a better foundation for any church than mere learning.

It was in 1817 that Lord Selkirk visited his colony here. A member of the Church of Scotland, as his son (the present Earl) is a member and elder of the same, he sympathized with the people in their desire to have a minister of their own faith. Standing on the lots where now St. John's Cathedral and College are, surrounded by the colonists, Lord Selkirk said, “These two lots I intend granting, the former for your church, as you have already formed a churchyard on it, and the latter for your school.” On being reminded of the condition to provide a minister, their patron again promised it, saying, “Selkirk never forfeited his word.”

Weary with the troubles of his colony, and his health failing fast, Lord Selkirk returned to Britain in 1818, and in 1819 was so ill as to be compelled to go to the south of France, whither he went to die. Before going, true to his promise, he committed the duty of supplying to the colonists a minister of their own faith to Mr. John Pritchard, at that time in London in his employ. On the 13th October 1819, the Hudson's Bay Company through this gentleman's advice and much to the regret of the Selkirk Colonists appointed with a grant of £100 a year a minister for them of another faith than their own. This was the more trying to the colonists, that the French Canadian Roman Catholics had, through Lord Selkirk's assistance, had in 1818 a religious teacher of their own church sent to them. The missionary of the Church Missionary Society and his successors were men of zeal and devotion. The Highland Colonists however, were not satisfied. They maintained in their homes their sacred fire; family worship and cottage prayer meetings were well kept up. They attended the services of the company's chaplain at St. John, but they held their own faith; their own version of the psalms was sung; the clergymen wore no ecclesiastical garments to which they were unaccustomed; and when the Bishop of Montreal visited the settlement in 1844 none of the Selkirk colonists would receive confirmation. In Governor McKenzie's time, between 1820-30, in Governor Christie's time, between 1830-40, they held repeated meetings and sent petitions—unavailing petitions—to Britain. In June, 1844, through Governor Finlayson's advice petitions and claims were sent to the Hudson's Bay Company, in London, but still to no effect. The company would acknowledge no claim; nor I suppose was there any legal claim upon them. Put not your trust in princes. A copy of their last petition was, however, sent to the moderator of the new-born and zealous Free Church of Scotland and given to Dr. John Bonar, of the Colonial Committee. It was turned over to the Presbyterian Church of Canada and to a relative of Dr. Bonar, viz., Dr. Robert Burns, of Toronto—"clarum et venerabile nomen"—a man than whom there stands none higher in the missionary annals of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. With the prescient eye of a leader, Dr. Burns selected Mr. John Black, one of the first band of students that entered Knox College, Toronto. After a long journey over the

prairies from the Mississippi, Mr. Black arrived in Red River 10th of September, 1851. On the first Sabbath after his arrival Mr. Black worshipped with the settlers in St. John's. On the following Sabbath, in the manse, which they had erected on the site of the present Kildonan manse, 300 Presbyterians with their young Canadian minister resumed the broken line of succession of 33 years before, when the godly elder Sutherland had ceased to conduct their devotions. The period of 40 years from the landing of the first band of Selkirk settlers on the shore of Hudson's Bay had passed when Mr. Black reached Red River. Such was the infancy of Presbyterianism on the Red River. An uncertain, sickly, and much threatened infancy it had been, but life remained, and if there is one name deserving notice more than another during this period it is that of Alexander Ross, sheriff of Assiniboia, to whom afterwards Dr. Black became related by marriage.

ITS CHILDHOOD

With what words, brethren, shall I characterize the man who gave it visibility to Presbyterianism in the Northwest. Like James Sutherland, John Black was an eminently pious and devoted man; he was besides a politic, peace-loving and conciliatory man. The church needs variety of temper and disposition—diversities of gifts in its ministers. No doubt, under the circumstances, he was the right man in the right place. He gained the esteem and support of the Hudson's Bay Company, which had been previously averse, if not hostile to Presbyterianism; he won the respect of the other churches of the land; he was beloved by his people. To distant Athabasca and Mackenzie River, the aroma of his goodness extended. He was more over a student, a thinker, a man of pulpit power, and an earnest social reformer. The degree of Doctor of Divinity, given him by Queen's University, but put in definite form what every one who knew him felt was his due. For eleven laborious years he stood alone.

It was in 1862 that a man of kindred spirit joined him, under the auspices of the new body of Canada Presbyterians, who as Presbyterian Church of Canada and United Presbyterian Church had united the year before—I mean James Nisbet Kildonan and Little Britain then represented the sum total of Northwest Presbyterianism. The one was the Selkirk Colony, the other almost the only

half-breed congregation belonging to us in the country, and always identified with the name of the late Hon. Donald Gunn, a legislative councillor—a useful man of science—a historian, and better still, a good friend of the Church. Mr. Nisbet was a man of great industry and perseverance; he possessed that courage which made his brother a successful South Sea missionary. Able to plan and build houses, as well as to instruct the people, he was well suited for a new country. If Dr. Black was our Northwestern pioneer Home Missionary, Mr. Nisbet was our pioneer Indian Missionary. The mission begun by him on the banks of the Saskatchewan at Prince Albert in 1866 has gathered round it the principal settlement of the Northwest Territories. Remember them that had the rule over you. Though they are dead, yet their memories speak. Two other brethren, Messrs. Fletcher and McNab, joined these pioneers, and the four in 1870 made up the Presbytery of Manitoba, established in that year. They have all gone from us, though one who was with them as an unordained helper, Rev. Mr. Whimster, has come back to us after the lapse of years, and Rev. Alexander Matheson, who had previously worked with them, has since returned and still remains amongst us. As I know the Presbytery of Manitoba in 1871, in the second year of its existence, the four brethren, Black, Nisbet, Fletcher and McNab were its ministerial members, and Kildonan, Little Britain, Headingly, Poplar Point, High Bluff, Portage la Prairie and Prince Albert—seven in all—were its preaching points in the country. From 1851 to 1870 made up the years of its childhood. The formation of a Presbytery by the church was coincident with great political changes in the country, viz., the transfer to Canada. Many a time I had the pleasure of discussing with Dr. Black the old Red River days. They were halcyon days to him; they were the days of his early ministry—of his growing family—of a strong personal influence. The Canadian occupation of the country came in the 20th year of his ministry, and made great changes—but Dr. Black was ever a warm friend to the new comer—and became as dearly beloved by the new as he had been, and continued to be by the old.

ITS YOUTH.

Of the third era of Presbyterianism in the Northwest, beginning with the Canadian occupation—which I may call the

youth of Presbyterianism in this country.—I can speak from personal knowledge. It was my good fortune to have to do with two important events in our history, viz., the organization of Knox Church, Winnipeg, early in 1872, and the establishment of Manitoba College, October, 1871. Knox Church has influenced our cause in this country very much; it has given the idea of organization to many; its early determination to be self-sustaining gave the cue to many another to be as independent as possible of central mission funds; its cultivation of a musical service has been of use to our cause; its early employment of instrumental music, not as a destroyer of vocal praise, but as an aid, has prevented us from ever having an "organ" case in the Northwest, while its use of our excellent hymn-book has led to its introduction in many congregations of the Synod.

Of Manitoba College it needs not that I should speak; it has ever been a rallying point for the church. There can be no doubt that from 1870 to 1881 was the formative period of our church history. From being numerically insignificant at the beginning of this period the consciousness gradually grew within us that we were relatively gaining in strength and force, not by depreciating others, not by proselytism nor by any unfair methods, but by energetically following the settler and by preaching Christ. And brethren it was not a mere happen so. Guided, I have no doubt, by divine impulse, our Presbytery set itself early to work up its case in Canada. It boldly took stand as a Canadian church when others hesitated. I remember in 1872 at the Assembly in Hamilton, a leading member of the Assembly expressed contempt for Manitoba; for years we had to bear with rebuffs: but by personal appeal, by constant newspaper articles and letter, by continued asking of the Assembly we obtained recognition; the Canadian church began to feel the importance of the Northwest; next it began to feel a little proud of its operations, until now she will do almost anything Manitoba asks. From 1870 to 1884, her interest may be measured by a sum of not less than \$200,000 sent to assist us in missionary and educational work. I believe, moreover, that the large influx of Canadian population of the Presbyterian faith that we have seen here, is largely to be accounted for by this growth of interest throughout our church in the Northwest from the persistent action of

our Presbytery. During this period also the union of the Presbyterians of Canada in one strong body in 1875 no doubt helped on the work—though as early as 1872 both bodies in the Assembly and Synod of that year agreed to work together, and Prof. Hart was sent to the Northwest as the pioneer of the Church of Scotland element among us. I have not time to dwell further on what is no doubt the most important part of our history, but I hasten to notice the fourth period.

OUR MAJORITY.

I have named 1881 as its beginning, rather than 1884, for we were agreed two years ago as to our need of a Synod, but technicalities have delayed it till now. 1881 was a remarkable year in our history. The work of the missions had so grown, that we felt the need of more machinery. We recommended the Assembly to establish a superintendency of Missions. The assembly called the energetic pastor of Knox Church to that office. No doubt some feared an infringement on our Presbyterian polity by the institution of such an office. Properly understood, the office of Superintendent of Missions does not so infringe. The superintendent was under the direction of the Presbytery, as in the future he will be under that of the Synod. After all, Presbytery is the strongest kind of government. Just as the free, representative Government of Britain or America has more power than the Czar, or the Emperor of China, so rule by a Presbytery is more efficient than that by a Bishop. In the year 1881, church extension in Winnipeg took a decided start in the organization of the vigorous congregation of St. Andrew's, which threatens to outstrip its mother church—the beginning of a movement of church extension for the city only checked by the commercial depression of the country. The year 1881 was also marked by the erection of the beautiful and comfortable new building for Manitoba College—a credit to our church and a joy to all our visitors. At this time, too, one of our best works was begun by the Superintendent of Missions in the organization of the Church and Manse Building Fund. This has been one of the most useful agencies of the church. In three years a goodly number of churches and manses have been erected. At this time, too, the interests of our Northwestern church had become strong enough to enable us to venture on expeditions of a predatory nature, and though Chalmers'

church, Halifax, St. Andrew's church, Ottawa, St. James' Square, Toronto, and other places have been the sufferers, we have been large gainers. Surely I am right in saying we have now reached a budding manhood of great potency and promise. I cannot mention in detail the faithful men of our Presbytery who, under God, have accomplished all this, but this I will say that no more devoted or highly educated band of Home Missionaries exists so far as I know anywhere. They and their partners in life have "endured hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ." To the eye of the worldly or the votary of pleasure, the obscure country minister, as he is sometimes called, may occupy no high place, but in the eye of the Master, who was himself a foot-sore and weary—even a poverty-stricken Home Missionary, they are His dearest heroic souls. Yes, there are first that shall be last, and last that shall be first. The band of seven ministers and one catechist of 1870 with seven preaching places had as I gather from the latest authoritative documents grown last year (1883) to 58 ordained ministers, 22 students, 4 catechists, and 9 elders engaged as preachers—in all 93, and these maintained services at 250 different points. The five church buildings in 1870, costing say \$14,000, have become this year, including the college, 61, valued at about \$280,000. From having 198 Presbyterian families in 1872, we have now some 3,500. What had God wrought may surely be our united exclamation! In the few minutes remaining to me let me point out in the merest outline what the texts suggest as giving us advice as a church in the future.

BE A PREACHING CHURCH—"PREACH THE WORD."

The pulpit is not declining. There never was a time when there were so many great preachers as now. Spurgeon, Farrar and Hall are the peers of the preachers of any age. I could mention other great preachers by the hundred. The opportunity of the pulpit has never been so great as now, and so the demands upon the pulpit were never before so great. A church that is not in favor of preaching is not in favor of intelligence. It is trite to say that communities have risen in intelligence. The preacher should in general intelligence be the peer of any of his hearers. In his knowledge of the Bible and of religion, in his power to deal with his subject advantageously he should be peerless in his

congregation. It is as absurd to speak of a minister not being able to preach as to speak of a knife that will not cut. It should be the consuming thought of the minister's life how he may preach efficiently. As the business man broods over his ventures, as the literary man becomes filled with his subject, as the doctor is anxious about his patients, so it should be a study to the preacher to adapt the truth to his hearers, to consider what is best suited to the minds, tastes, habits and foibles of his people, in order that where these are wrong they may be corrected, or right may be confirmed. But he is bound to preach the Word. His preaching is to be within certain limits. He is a man set apart for religion. The church where he preaches is dedicated for religious purposes. The day on which he usually preaches is a religious day. The text book—the Bible—with which he deals is a religious book; and the Bible is a wide enough field for the preacher. Not that his sermons should be simply a string of texts; not that he should concatenate theological commonplaces and call that a sermon; not that he should suppose the goodness of his motive will compensate for the dullness of the sermon. No, his sermon should be a living, organic whole, evolved from his mind, inter-penetrated by the subject taken from God's Word. May we adopt the motto of one of the cities of the mother land as ours: "Let Manitoba flourish by the preaching of the Word."

BE A CHURCH FOR THE TIMES.

We seem, as a Church, well adapted for our rising Canadian nationality. We are not a foreign Church—an exotic. We are a Church of the soil. I find our 54 ordained ministers in the Northwest received their theological training as follows: Knox College, Toronto, 18; Queen's, Kingston, 6; Montreal College, 6; Halifax College, 3; Manitoba College, 4; elsewhere in Canada, 6—i. e., 80 per cent, Canadian. Whatever the times need, adapt your teaching to them. If it is a time when unsound doctrine is prevalent and both texts refer to that, capture if you can, like Constantine the Pantheon—where were arrayed the world's false gods, and make it a Christian temple; bring in the ark of the living God and Dagon will fall on the grunsel edge with head and hands lopped off; preach the perfect Christ, and the cold ghosts of infidel opinion will flit away; teach positive Christian truth and the negations of Agnosticism are heard of no more. This

will require great watchfulness, a clear eye and lofty Christian penetration that will, like Ithuriel's spear, disclose the error at first approach. And, too, brethren, this will require great patience, shrewdness and common sense. We all fail in these. It may be necessary to practise at different times such widely different maxims as Solomon gives, Answer a fool according to his folly, and, on the other hand, Answer not a fool according to his folly. We are not to go with the times, in the same way as an earless boat floats down stream—making a truce with error by surrendering the truth. When a man finds the worldly, the dissolute, the people who do not go to church, and the ribald portion of the press commending his preaching and his theology, he may be sure it is time to cry a halt. What is called the popular sentiment on religious questions is half the time wrong, simply because it is not the sentiment of religious people. The skilful preacher will select from his text-book what suits the time, the place, the season, the people. Our Saviour did so. In the spring time He spoke of the sower; going through the yellow fields He spoke of the world's great harvest; to the merchants He spoke of talents; to the woman at the Sychar well of the water of life; where the distant hillsides were covered with vines he preached the Gospel by picturing the husbandmen. Brethren, we should not preach over the people's heads, nor preach of things having no interest in them. We should feel bound to make every sermon interesting and useful. There is no subject so universally interesting, so belonging to every age, and that men of every station in life so generally wish to hear of as "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day and forever." Not that the freshness and beauty of Christ should be blurred by what is sometimes known as theological preaching, which is often Christless. I would desire Christ to be made a living, real person before the hearer; the human, sympathizing friend; the great miracle-worker; the meek, and gentle, and sinless one; the model missionary and model for industry in every walk of life; the great social regenerator and benefactor; the saviour; the shepherd giving his life for the sheep; the sacrificial victim offered up for the sins of men; the majestic sufferer; the atoning Lamb of God; the chosen and accepted substitute for man. I would follow him to Gethsemane, to the

cross, to the tomb, to the glorious resurrection, to the ascension from Olivet, and pass with him in thought to Heaven, where he sits a king, to whom every knee should bow. Ah, brethren, these are outlines of a theme on which we may employ all the resources of eloquence, poetry, history, art, science, imagination, philosophy, literature, and theology; and all our sermons should be like over-concentring circles, sweeping in and in like the mighty maelstrom, involving our hearers in a whirl of interest, until they are brought to Christ—the great Rock of Salvation.

BE A FAITHFUL, NOT A TIME-SERVING CHURCH.
REPROVE, REBUKE, EXHORT.

Brother, this is our most critical work. We aim at having a pure church. I am little concerned about having a comprehensive church, if it be not pure. It should be pure in doctrine and pure in life. We want it real. I need not say it should be a religious body. It is not a political organization; it is not a fashionable coterie; it is not a selection of highly respectable or highly intellectual persons. Every one belonging to it should be a living, active member of the body of Christ, and to make it so our teaching should be outspoken. Things should be called by their right names. Righteous indignation against evil was one of our Saviour's characteristics. There should be, in order to do our work well, faithful house to house visitation. Our visits should be religious visits, not mere society calls. Our forefathers followed the practice of a regular examination of every household in religious knowledge. Our new world life seems not to permit such a thing. There is more freedom and off-handedness needed amongst us, but if a minister has a definite religious aim he'll find opportunity; and depend upon it the people long for religious conversation. They feel disappointed when the minister goes away without dealing with the great subject of which they look on him as the exponent. In our very scattered population I believe such visits will be more useful than public preaching even. I cannot understand the missionary who, when the people in their new homes long to see a friendly face, fails to make use of so great an opportunity for usefulness. During my nearly thirteen years Manitoba life, I know missionary after missionary of fair preaching power who has failed—become a burden to his field and a burden to the Presbytery—and on the plea of business, or distance, or on account of indolence has left his

field unvisited, who has received reproof, rebuke and exhortation from the people rather than having been the messenger of God to them. But while discipline should be maintained, and faithful dealing followed yet the text says this must be done discreetly. How hard it is to be faithful and not censorious. And kind, friendly dealing is far more consonant with the spirit of Christ than ecclesiastical censures, anathemas, and thunderbolts, though these have their place. As the loving and yet upright, faithful father is most beloved by his family, so the conscientious minister, who comes like sunshine into the dwelling will be beloved by his people.

BE AN AGGRESSIVE CHURCH.

Truth is always aggressive. It cannot divide the house with error. It must either die itself or vanquish its enemy. Disease must be expelled, that health may come; prejudice must be overcome that knowledge may enter; when the light shines forth, the shadows flee away. Sin desires to be let alone. But it is a deadly cancer, and grows with terrific power. It cannot be left alone, for its end is death. There is a cry for deliverance from it every where. The crowded city calls us to seek out its miseries. Sin-sick human nature though it strive to hide itself away must be followed, sought out, and the remedy applied. The gospel is a sure remedy, if we skilfully and zealously apply it. So, bands of settlers, without our aid, soon lapse. The day of rest goes; children grow up in ignorance; society sinks; practical paganism follows. Our business is to press on. To plant a church, send a missionary, support him so long as there is need. The sound of the church going bell is soon followed by a change of morals. In town and country alike the cry is come and help us. If there are great sins threatening the community we must grapple with them. Strong drink is a mighty evil in the land. Whatever others say we believe it to be a church question. We are bound to oppose it. The press may more or less openly advocate lax views on the Sabbath, on the relations of the sexes, on pernicious literature, and may scoff at morality. Our duty is by word and pen to oppose this. If there is carelessness, ignorance, crime, wrong, vice, irreligion or godlessness, we are bound to use this gospel which is "mighty for the pulling down of strongholds." If then the departed great had faith, if it led to Christ,

I say, imitate their faith. Believe in your mission. You have the widest and best prospects. Remember you are ambassadors — elders as well as ministers — for Christ. It seems to me as if the mantle of our venerable father, Dr. Black, had fallen upon us as an encouragement to go forth in our Home Mission work; it seems to me as if the faithful service of our devoted missionary, James Nisbet, were like a beacon light upon the western prairies calling us to evangelize the redman on his reserves; it seems to me as if a long line of Presbyterian heroes from Knox down-

ward were an inspiring cloud of witnesses to encourage us in educating the young, in keeping aloft the standard of higher education that we may have an able and educated ministry; it seems to me as if the emblem of our forefathers of the burning bush with its motto "nec tamen consumebatur" were an inspiration to us to believe more firmly in our principles; it seems to me if there is anything upon which to fix our thought as we undertake the great work of our new Synod, it is upon our Rock and our Defence — Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever.